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Administration Official Defends Programs

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Amid a White House review of affirmative action programs, the administration's top civil rights official yesterday defended the programs.

"This administration is committed to the goal of expanding opportunity for all Americans in education, employment and the economy generally. There will be no retreat from that commitment," Deval L. Patrick, assistant attorney general for civil rights, told a House subcommittee hearing. "Regrettably, discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and gender persists in this country."

The White House is doing a top-to-bottom review of the programs, which were first instituted during the Nixon administration. The review is designed primarily to eliminate any instances where affirmative action has been used to benefit unqualified people, the officials said.

Patrick told the House Economic and Educational Opportunities subcommittee on employer-employee relations that the administration's objective is to "determine, to the best of our capability, what works and what does not today." He declined to discuss any details.

Rep. Harris W. Fawell (R-Ill.) subcommittee chairman, highlighted GOP objections. "Affirmative action has brought us real achievements," he said. "But now . . . we should ask if it is time to consider whether we have passed that period of 'transitional inequality' and should begin to move away from our reliance on affirmative action."